

Jenny Geer
871 Fenimore Rd, Larchmont, NY 10538
914-396-8552
jennygeer77@gmail.com

Testimony for State Senate Elections Hearing 8/9/21 Westchester County

Good morning, my name is Jenny Geer — for the past 30 years I've lived in Larchmont and am a lifelong resident of NYS.

I am also a leader of Larchmont/Mamaroneck Indivisible, one of many grassroots Indivisible groups in Westchester.

Thank you for holding this hearing for voters and for opening it up to walk-ins. I do want to point out that the online form was very intimidating, and should be made less so, if you want regular people to sign up to testify.

Full disclosure: I am not an expert on elections or voting. I don't have a title or a resume on this topic and I'm not a lawyer. Before 2017, though I was always a voter, I didn't know much about how elections work. During the last four years I have made a concerted effort to learn more about how elections work, and to be a more engaged and informed voter.

First I want to thank you all for making voting easier, for enabling early voting and all the other voting reforms that you have put in place statewide. While NY may have been in the dark ages before 2019, now, as states like Florida and Texas are moving backwards, it is good to see that we are moving forward.

Second, we still have a long way to go. I know you have a bill pending, the John Lewis Voting Rights Act of NY, which would make NY a national leader in protecting voting rights. I hope you are able to pass it this coming year — we need it — and I would like to help.

Third, I want to ask you to make significant reforms to the structure of our Boards of Elections. It seems completely inappropriate to me that the boards are designed to be run by political operatives who may have no experience with election administration. In Westchester County, for years it has been the heads of the two political parties running the show, which seems an obvious conflict of interest. With this setup, who is representing the voters? It may seem like this structure offers some balance, but what about the many unaffiliated voters who

last time I checked were more numerous than Republicans in our state? In 2018 I was astounded to learn that one of the County legislators who had just lost her election was promptly given a new job at the Board of Elections as a political appointee, for a handsome salary. The Board of Elections should be above this.

Also this kind of unprofessional leadership does not lead to good decision-making, and I have some examples to share.

1) On primary day in 2020 we had some of the worst voting experiences in the state. In my town of Mamaroneck people were waiting to vote until past 1:30 am. Granted, it was a tough election because of COVID but the BOE did not meet the moment. In particular it did almost nothing to promote early voting, which could have alleviated some of the problems on Primary Day. As someone who tried to help inform voters in my community about how to vote, I found this incredibly frustrating.

2) In general, voter communication from our BOE is woefully inadequate. For the primary this year I received a card in the mail that was so nondescript that I almost missed it, but luckily I read it carefully and saw that my polling place had been changed without explanation, right before the election. I think it was wrong to wait until the last minute to inform voters about this change. Also, in 2021 it seems incredible that the BOE could not design a card with two colors to highlight such an important piece of information.

3) Then there's the issue of sample ballots. When preparing to vote, it would be nice to be able to take a look at a sample ballot before heading to the polls. But sample ballots are never made available by our BOE, so we have to wait until we go to vote to see the actual ballot. And since the ballots are often confusing and hard to read, this leads to extra time and longer lines.

4) Finally, there's the BOE website. If you go to the website today, on the homepage you will find not a single reference to the November election. Instead the entire page is devoted to details about the June primary of two months ago. In less than three months we are electing the ENTIRE Westchester County government, but the website doesn't even have the date. I'm not a website designer but that seems kind of basic.

I want to say **I have no issue with the employees of the Board of Elections** — they always seem helpful, efficient, and hard-working. But the leadership is a different matter. Instead of partisan appointees, we should have independent professionals leading the board, people who are going to represent the voters and not their political parties.

As a final and related point, I would like to ask that you move swiftly to **ban the hybrid voting machines** that have been considered for purchase by the Boards of Elections, which have the potential to be hacked to change votes after they have been cast. These machines pose a significant danger to our democracy. Once again, it is hard to imagine that a truly professional Board of Elections would even entertain the purchase of such risky voting machines.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.